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ABSTRACT

Achievement of the six National Education Goals will require changes in the present educational system, change in how communities respond to education, and especially change in how education is visualized. An effective guidance program has the capacity to make major contributions to all of the National Education Goals. School administrators, guidance directors, and others who are in a position to help to determine the goals and content of their guidance programs can significantly enhance this capacity by encouraging the implementation of the following strategies: (1) adopt a "comprehensive guidance" program model which provides for the systematic delivery of guidance as a curriculum organized around a sound theoretical framework; (2) reach out to the community to involve parents and other community members in both the determination of guidance priorities and the delivery of counseling and guidance services; (3) encourage collaboration and teamwork among the various education specialties; and (4) emphasize that the mission of a guidance program is the facilitation of better student adjustment as an intermediate outcome that enables students to achieve better academic performance rather than better student adjustment as an end in itself. By adopting a clear commitment to helping students achieve educational excellence and using a collaborative, community-based guidance approach, counselors can become a strong force for the attainment of the six National Education Goals. (Specific counselor interventions are listed for each of the six National Education Goals.) (ABL)

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ERIC DIGEST

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Striving for Excellence

Counselor Strategies for Contributing to the National Education Goals

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Achievement of the six National Education Goals adopted by President Bush and the nation's governors will require changes in our present educational system, change in how our communities respond to education, and especially change on how education is visualized. More than anything else it requires a new level of collaboration by significant individuals and groups and a full commitment by the community. What is needed is "...an education revolution," a basic change in how education is envisaged and the manner in which it is delivered.

Counselors have always played important roles in ushering in new educational goals and priorities. Whether helping students at risk to acquire the insights and skills supportive to their staying in school or assisting all students to make appropriate career choices and plans which are important to both the students' and the country's future, counselors have played a significant role in providing support for educational priorities. To participate in the achievement of the six National Education Goals, counselors are shifting their efforts to focus on student learning and achievement to a higher degree than ever before.

Contributive Program Strategies

An effective guidance program, perhaps more than any other educational component, has the capacity to make major contributions to all six National Education Goals. School administrators, guidance directors, and others who are in a position to help determine the goals and content of their guidance programs can significantly enhance this capacity by encouraging the implementation of the following strategies:

1. Adopt a "comprehensive guidance" program model. This model provides for the systematic delivery of guidance as a curriculum organized around a sound theoretical framework, rather than a set of loosely related services. Features of the model that are particularly relevant to the National Goals include: (a) a focus on student behavior outcomes; (b) delivery of coordinated guidance services K–12; (c) attention to all students' developmental guidance needs; and (d) program evaluation and accountability.
2. Reach out to the community to involve parents and other community members in both the determination of guidance priorities and the delivery of counseling and guidance services. Meeting the guidance needs of all students in a school cannot be done by two or three counselors. However, counselors who play a "brokering" role by coordinating the many valuable contributions that others can make can significantly extend and enhance the guidance services that students receive.
3. Encourage collaboration and teamwork among the various education specialties. If teachers, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other education specialists can be freed from a concern about "turf" issues, they can devote more time and energy to a concerted effort to achieving the National Education Goals.
4. Emphasize the mission of a guidance program to be the facilitation of better student adjustment as an intermediate outcome that enables students to achieve better academic performance rather than better student adjustment as an end in itself.

Specific Counselor Interventions

As individuals, counselors have the opportunities and skills to contribute to each of the National Education Goals in many different ways. The following examples provide an illustration of how counselors can and do contribute to each Goal.

Goal 1. All children in America will start school ready to learn.

Counselors can:

- Assist in the selection of appropriate kindergarten screening instruments.
- Provide staff consultation on the interpretation of test results.
- Coordinate the kindergarten screening process.
- Interpret test results to parents.
- Provide information and support to parents.
- Work with Head Start and other pre-school programs to provide a smooth transition for students entering kindergarten.

Goal 2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

Counselors can:

- Help each student establish meaningful education and career goals.
- Identify and work with potential dropouts, individually and in small groups, at an early stage.
- Work with teachers, parents, and students to insure that individual students are able to stay at grade level.
- Address student attendance problems at an early stage.
- Interface school and community dropout prevention resources.
- Provide a caring and mentoring environment for students.
- Provide counseling to students whose personal and family problems interfere with their school performance.
- Help students whose parents do not value education to develop an understanding of the importance of a high school diploma in today's competitive job market.
- Assist schools to use alternative approaches to assessment that, through meaningful feedback to students, motivate them to learn.

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Goal 3. American students will be competent in the core subjects.

Counselors can:

- Assist students to develop effective study skills and habits.
- Help students to assess and make use of their individual learning styles.
- Establish programs that respect and reward student achievement in the core subjects.
- Provide consultation and/or individualized student assessment to help teachers diagnose specific learning problems of students.
- Work collaboratively with teachers to develop individualized study plans for students experiencing difficulty.
- Collaborate with teachers to undertake action research studies that compare the effectiveness of various education and counseling interventions.
- Help students overcome performance blocks due to test anxiety.

Goal 4. U.S. dents will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

Counselors can:

- Emphasize the importance of math and science in the workplace.
- Encourage students to enroll in math and science courses.
- Help students explore career opportunities in math and science.
- Encourage girls and minorities to enroll in math and science courses.
- Help students who have had difficulty in math and science in the past improve their study skills or develop new study strategies specifically for math and science.
- Assist students to examine and discard fears or negative attitudes towards preparation for careers in science and mathematics.

Goal 5. Every adult American will be literate and possess the skills necessary to compete in a world economy.

Counselors can:

- Work with dropouts and potential dropouts to get them involved in adult education programs.
- Provide career guidance that informs students of the basic skills necessary to compete in today's job market.
- Encourage students to view learning as a lifelong process.

Goal 6. Every school will be safe and free of drugs.

Counselors can:

- Help parents and teachers recognize the signs of early drug use by students.
- Work collaboratively with special counselors employed in drug prevention programs.
- Help students learn how to overcome peer pressure.
- Work with administrators and teachers to develop and implement effective group guidance programs for preventing crime and violence in schools.
- Provide counseling to victims of violence.

Conclusion

As Ravitch points out, "Across America, in state after state, a decade of major reforms in education has so far failed to produce the anticipated improvement in the quality of our schools or the academic achievement of our students...Notably muted in the debate [regarding effective reform strategies] has been discussion of the engagement and motivation of the students themselves. It is a curious omission, for even if we raise standards and succeed at restructuring our schools and improving the quality of our teachers, the result may be little or no improvement unless our children also increase the level of their effort." (Tomlinson, 1992, p. iii).

Motivation is a complex psychological state that involves both the affective and cognitive domains. Without personally meaningful goals and objectives, both short and long term, students are not likely to put forth the effort that is needed for them to attain academic achievement. Counselors can help students develop these goals.

"School counselors are often the only mental health professionals to whom students will have access and they are the professionals who bridge the academic and affective domains in students' lives" (American School Counselor Association, 1992). By adopting a clear commitment to helping students achieve educational excellence and using a collaborative, community-based guidance approach, counselors can become a strong force for the attainment of the six National Education Goals.

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